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RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0193
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SUBJECT: KERALA COMMUNISTS SLAM HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The recently released Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007 (Human Rights Report) drew sharp rebukes from leftists in the South Indian state of Kerala. The state's ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) described the report as an "imperialist strategy to sabotage" the communist governments in Kerala and West Bengal. The leftists focused on references to deaths in police custody in the state, but also took issue with the report's mention of the violence in CPI(M)-controlled Nandigram, West-Bengal. The anguished protest against the Human Rights Report's rather straightforward discussion of events in Kerala demonstrates that any comment from the United States can be perceived as an all-out attack by the state's leftists. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Indian media reports after the March 14 release of the Human Rights Report focused on references to the violence in Nandigram, West Bengal (reftels) and, to a lesser degree, on custodial deaths in Kerala. The emphasis on West Bengal and Kerala led to suggestions that U.S. antipathy to the communist parties that govern the two states, especially in light of their opposition to U.S.-India civil nuclear cooperation, had played a role in the drafting of the report. Kerala-based leftists quickly took to spinning the story. According to media reports, CPI(M) State Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan said that the report's objective was to

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isolate Kerala and West Bengal and to tarnish the image of their CPI(M)-led governments. Communist Party of India (CPI) State Secretary Veliyam Bhargavan reportedly described the document as an

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attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the country and suggested that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency was at work, mentioning the oft-discussed in Kerala question of the Agency's role in undermining the state's first elected Communist government in 1957.

¶3. (SBU) The Human Rights Report's reference to custodial deaths in Kerala was quite straightforward: "the Kerala State Human Rights Commission (KSHRC) registered 25 cases of custodial deaths from January to June, compared with 39 cases in 2005. According to KSHRC, 46 persons died in state custody throughout the year. The commission-led investigation of these deaths was ongoing at year's end." Kerala's Home Minister Koderi Balakrishnan disavowed the Human Rights Commission's own figures, telling reporters that "the

references about custodial deaths in Kerala in the report are totally untrue as no custodial death had taken place in the state in 2007." (NOTE: We believe that in denying the story Home Minister Balakrishnan was conflating the issue of custodial deaths with deaths attributable to torture. We take him to be claiming that nobody died in policy custody as a result of torture, not that that there were no deaths at all of people in custody. Post stands by the accuracy of the Human Rights Report's information on custodial deaths in Kerala, which we received from the state's own Human Rights Commission. END NOTE.)

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The leftist ire at the Human Rights Reports' straightforward discussion of Kerala shows the depth of their suspicion -- which rises to paranoia -- about U.S. intentions here. In addition to Balakrishnan's disavowing the reports of custodial deaths, leftist leaders were quick to throw out the well worn accusations of a shadowy U.S. plot to interfere in India's internal politics and of CIA operations in Kerala. Although Kerala's communist leaders have been quite willing to talk to us in the recent years, we expect they will be reluctant to do so until the temperature over the Human Rights Report cools down. On the national scene, furor over the CPI(M)-sponsored violence last year in Nandigram had faded but the CPI(M)'s shrill reaction to the Human Rights Report has served only to shine the spotlight once again on the party's brutal tactics to protect its turf. END COMMENT.

¶5. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy New Delhi.

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